

WE CLAIM:

1. An automated method for referring a prospective customer to one or more prospective dealers of automobiles and/or automobile services comprising:
 - a) prompting the prospective customer to enter customer information about the prospective customer;
 - b) receiving customer information about the prospective customer;
 - c) querying a database using the received customer information that contains:
 - (1) dealer information about the identity and location of a plurality of dealers of automobiles and/or automobile services; and
 - (2) contact information about prior contacts in the database between the prospective customer and dealers in the database; and
 - d) reporting the results of the query to the prospective customer.
2. The method of claim 1 wherein the customer information includes at least a portion of the prospective customer's address.
3. The method of claim 1 wherein the customer information includes at least one from the group consisting of the prospective customer's name, address, zip code, city or state.
4. The method of claim 1 wherein there is a plurality of types of prior contacts.
5. The method of claim 4 wherein there is a hierarchy within the plurality of types of prior contacts.
6. The method of claim 5 wherein a prior selling relationship is highest in the hierarchy of prior contacts.
7. The method of claim 5 wherein other selling relationships are ranked below prior selling relationships in the hierarchy.

8. The method of claim 5 wherein prior service relationships are ranked below all selling relationships in the hierarchy.

9. The method of claim 5 wherein types of relationships other than selling and service relationships are ranked below prior service relationships.

10. The method of claim 1 wherein a list of the dealers of automobiles and/or automobile services nearest to the customer is returned if there are no prior contacts found.

11. The method of claim 1 wherein the results are divided into a plurality of sets.

12. The method of claim 11 wherein each set lists dealers of a particular type of prior contact.

13. The method of claim 11 wherein one set of results is viewed at a time.

14. The method of claim 11 wherein a set of results has a link leading to the next possible set of results.

15. The method of claim 11 wherein sets are displayed in order of the hierarchy.

16. The method of claim 11 wherein each dealer listed in the set has a link for displaying a map of its location.

17. The method of claim 11 wherein each dealer listed in the set has a link for displaying directions to its location.

18. The method of claim 11 wherein a set lists dealers with the most recent prior contacts listed first.

19. The method of claim 11 wherein a set highlights the most recent dealer with a prior contact.

20. A system for referring a prospective customer to one or more prospective dealers of automobiles and/or automobile services, the system comprising:

- a) a remote client enabling the prospective customer to enter customer information about the prospective customer;
- b) a central computer/server to receive the information;
- c) a database configured to:
 - (1) dealer information about the identity and location of a plurality of dealers of automobiles and/or automobile services; and
 - (2) contact information about prior contacts between one or more of the dealers and one or more prospective customers;
- d) a processor for querying the database and generating results that give preference to prior contacts between the prospective customer and dealers; and
- e) means for transmitting results to the remote client.

21. The system of claim 20 wherein the remote client is configured with an Internet browser having forms capabilities.

22. The system of claim 20 wherein the means for transmitting the results is over the Internet.

23. An automated method for referring a prospective customer to one or more prospective dealers comprising:

- a) prompting the prospective customer to enter customer information about the prospective customer;
- b) receiving customer information about the prospective customer;
- c) querying a database using the received customer information that contains:
 - (1) dealer information about the identity and location of a plurality of dealers; and

(2) contact information about prior contacts between one or more of the dealers and one or more prospective customers, the query generating results that give preference to prior contacts in the database between the prospective customer and dealers in the database; and

d) reporting the results of the query to the prospective customer.

25. The method of claim 24 wherein the customer information comprises the prospective customer's address and zip code.

26. The method of claim 24 wherein the customer information includes at least one from the group consisting of the prospective customer's name, address, zip code, city or state.

27. The method of claim 24 wherein there is a plurality of types of prior contacts.

28. The method of claim 24 wherein there is a hierarchy within the plurality of types of prior contacts.

29. The method of claim 24 wherein a list of the dealers nearest to the customer is returned if there are no prior contacts found.

30. The method of claim 24 wherein the results are divided into a plurality of sets.

31. The method of claim 24 wherein each set lists dealers of a particular type of prior contact.

32. The method of claim 30 wherein one set of results is viewed at a time.

33. The method of claim 30 wherein a set of results has a link leading to the next possible set of results.

34. The method of claim 30 wherein sets are displayed in order of the hierarchy.

35. The method of claim 30 wherein each dealer listed in the set has a link for displaying a map of its location.

36. The method of claim 30 wherein each dealer listed in the set has a link for displaying directions to its location.

37. The method of claim 30 wherein a set lists dealers with the most recent prior contacts listed first.

38. The method of claim 30 wherein a set highlights the most recent dealer with a prior contact.